



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **North Dakota horse tests positive for West Nile Virus in Snohomish County**

OLYMPIA – State Veterinarian Dr. Robert Mead announced today a West Nile Virus blood test was positive from a horse that was imported into Washington from North Dakota in late August. The horse has shown no clinical signs of West Nile Virus (WNV). The one-year-old gelding was examined and treated for a respiratory infection on Sept. 3. The attending veterinarian sent a blood sample to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory at Ames, Iowa because the horse had recently arrived from North Dakota where horses have contracted WNV this year.

“Since this horse is not a clinical case and no doubt was exposed to the virus in North Dakota, this does not count as a West Nile Virus case in this state,” Mead said. The horse entered the state with a current health certificate and a negative Equine Infectious Anemia test. It is presently stabled in Snohomish County in the Arlington area.

"It is not surprising to see some imported horses test positive for the disease," Mead said. "We have seen the virus move westward since it was first identified in birds in New York in 1999 and have been aware that the virus has affected horses in North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming this year." A number of horses are brought in each year from those states.

Since the disease is spread only by mosquitoes that feed on infected birds, horses and humans are considered "dead end hosts" as it does not spread horse to horse or horse to human. Mosquitoes do not become infected from horses or humans. Because of this fact, no quarantine is issued for this disease in horses. The disease can be confused with western encephalitis or sleeping sickness, which has existed in the past in Eastern Washington.

### **Vaccination of horses recommended**

"Only a few horses that are exposed seem to develop clinical signs of illness. Of those that do develop signs, the death rate can be as high as 30 percent with few treatment options available," Mead said. For this reason, he is encouraging horse owners to consult their veterinarian and consider getting their horses vaccinated. West Nile Virus vaccine is conditionally licensed and studies show a minimum of two doses at 3-4 week intervals are required for protection. Protective levels of antibodies seem to not be produced for 2-3 weeks following the second dose of the vaccine.

To date there have been no positive WNV-infected mosquitoes or birds identified in Washington state. Two human cases and this horse case are believed to have been infected in other states where the disease has been present.

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